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PRIMARY ELECTIONS AND MAJORITY NOMINATIONS

CHARLES K. LUSH

The question of majority nominations in primary elections has been before the Wisconsin legislature during the last two sessions. (1905, Special Session, Bill 11A, and 1907, Bill 350A). Both times the proposition of securing majority nominations by means of the "second choice" has met defeat.

This is written with the hope of making plain the basic principle upon which the second choice amendment to the primary rests. It is the principle that the nominee of a political party should represent the party principles or policy of the majority of the voters of the party. It prevents the possibility of a man representing the principles of only one-fourth of the voting strength of the party being nominated as the candidate of the party, and in direct conflict with the views of three-fourths of the voters of the party. It was the recognition of this principle that caused the conventions to nominate by majority vote of the delegates instead of by plurality. The present Wisconsin primary law prevents a number of candidates representing the majority sentiment as to party principles from coming into the field as candidates for the nomination for fear the candidate of a minority may be named by receiving a higher vote than any one candidate among the majority candidates. The present primary is, in effect, a convention to which every voter is a delegate and in which the candidate receiving the most votes on the first ballot is the nominee. The remedy lies either in the adoption of the second choice amendment (derisively known as the Mary Ann law), or by return to the convention system.

An effort has been made to make it appear that the second choice system is very complicated. The voter casts one vote for a candidate as his first choice and another for the man whom he would like to see nominated if his first choice cannot be nominated. So far as the voter is concerned there is no "complication." Delegates who attend State conventions do not find it complicated to vote for their second choice after they find that their first choice can not be nominated.

A diagram of the tally sheet, and of the checking and computing blank will make the second choice proposition clear.

BALLOT		
FOR GOVERNOR	First Choice	Second Choice
Adams		
Brown	×	
Black		
White		
Gray		×

Following, is the official tally sheet upon which the first and second choice votes are entered, being called off in this case: “For governor, Brown first, Gray second.” Supposing the ballots of one precinct have been called off, the sheet shows as follows:

OFFICIAL BALLOT SHEET					
FOR GOVERNOR					
First Choice	Second Choice				
	Adams	Brown	Black	White	Gray
Adams.....25			15	10	
Brown.....43	15		25		3
Black.....20		15		5	
White.....55	7	10	30		8
Gray.....17		15		2	

Carried down the first choice vote, or first ballot of the “convention” is as follows:

Adams	25
Brown	43
Black	20
White	55
Gray	17

There being no majority on the count of first choice votes cast, and Gray being the lowest man, he is beaten and out of the race, so those who voted for Gray are entitled to have their votes counted for their second choice, making the result as follows:

Adams	25		
Brown	43	15	58
Black	20		
White	55	2	57

Black is now the low man, and the men who voted for him as their first choice are entitled to have their second choice votes counted for their second choice. Repeated as above brings the following result:

Adams	25		
Brown	58	15	73
White	57	5	62

There are now only Brown, White and Adams left, and Adams, being defeated and low man, his adherents are entitled to express a second choice and their votes are counted, making the final result as follows:

Brown	73	0	73
White	62	10	72

It will be seen by studying the above table that Brown made no gain on the final "ballot" for the reason that none of the 25 voters who voted for Adams for first choice voted for Brown for second choice. Ten of them, however, voted for White as their second choice while 15 of them voted for Black as their second choice. These 15 second choice votes are not counted for the reason that they were being counted for Adams while he was still in the race, and, before Adams was out of the race, Black was out of it. These voters simply voted for two losers. This explains why in the above showing between Brown and White their total vote is only 145, while there were 160 votes cast in all. But 15 of these votes were cast for Adams and Black, both of whom were low men—two losers.

This system does not always insure a majority of all votes cast, but it does insure the nomination of a candidate who represents the majority sentiment of the party as regards party principles. Let us illustrate by showing what can happen under the present law, where

a first choice alone counts and the high man is nominated, all of the rest being "eliminated." To begin with, remember that the present primary is, in effect, a party convention to which all party voters are delegates entitled to one vote on the only "roll call" allowed. The man who receives the highest vote on this "first ballot" (the primary vote) is the nominee of the party.

Let us suppose there were three tariff reform republican candidates and one stand-pat republican candidate in a congressional district having 10,000 republican votes of which 7000 were tariff reform and 3000 stand-pat republicans. At the primary the result could reasonably be supposed to be as follows:

A—Stand-pat candidate.....	3000
B—Tariff reform candidate.....	2500
C—Tariff reform candidate.....	2500
D—Tariff reform candidate.....	2000

By this result, which is the present system of the highest candidate being the nominee, the stand-pat republican would become the nominee of the 7000 voters absolutely opposed to the policy advocated by him. Could anything be more absurd than this?

Now let us use this same case and apply the second choice rule by which the lowest candidate is "eliminated" and not all but the highest "eliminated" which is the present primary law.

The first count of first choice votes would be as above given.

Each voter having expressed a second choice, and D, one of the tariff reform candidates, being the low man, he would be out of the race, so the voters who voted for him for first choice would be entitled to have their second choice votes counted. Now, would they not be sure to be divided between the two other tariff reform candidates—men who represented their views on party policy? Suppose they had divided, 1500 of these having been cast for B as their second choice, and 500 for C. The final result would be:

A—Stand-pat republican.....	3000
B—Tariff reform republican.....	4000
C—Tariff reform republican.....	3000

B would accordingly be the candidate representing the views of 7000 voters, instead of A representing the tariff policy of only 3000 voters.

Under the present nominating law it is necessary that the "boss," or leader, should "eliminate" the candidates of the majority before the primaries are held, otherwise the candidate of the minority would be the nominee of the party. Under the second choice feature, which was a part of the Australian law and left off by the drafters of the Wisconsin law, the voters do this "eliminating" at the primaries. Until this opportunity of selection is placed in the hands of the people there can be no true representative government.